

October 31, 2021

Texts: Ruth 1:1-18

Title: "Ruth: Loss, Loyalty, and Love"

Have any of you moved your home before from one location to another? And was it fun? My wife and I have moved several times over the years and each time we've been faced with all the stuff we've accumulated. And it seems like no matter how much of it you get rid of with each move, you're still bringing a lot of it with. Moving is a pain!! Although perhaps not as big a pain described by a woman named Renee who wrote about the stressful move she and her husband made a few years ago. A blizzard hit their town on the day of the move, and the moving company canceled on them so Renee and her husband decided they could do it themselves. Bad decision!

They lived on a hill with a very steep driveway. They couldn't back their rented truck up the driveway, so they loaded their furniture into their pickup truck, drove it down the hill to the moving truck, and then loaded up the moving truck. Imagine doing this with the ground covered with snow. On one of their trips down the driveway, their sofa fell off the back of their truck and rolled off the side of the hill. By the way, moving is often listed as one of life's major stressors along with the death of loved ones.

I'm thinking about the level of stress that Naomi and Ruth felt as they both moved on foot to a new and distant place, as, at the same time, they were both grieving the loss of their spouses. The story of Naomi and Ruth is an amazing story of loss, loyalty, and love. I want to share a few aspects of it today.

The story begins with a family in distress consisting of Elimelech, his wife, Naomi, and their two sons. A famine had spread throughout their land. Food and jobs were scarce. So Elimelech and Naomi packed up a U-Haul and moved to Moab, where there was more food.

They made this big move but then, over a period of a few years, first Elimelech and then, their two sons died. And so it became necessary for Naomi to move back to her family of origin in the land of Judah for there were no opportunities for her in Moab.

She knew that her two daughters-in-laws wouldn't be accepted in Judah. They were of a different tribe. But ultimately, Ruth stayed with her mother-in-law anyway. She loved and was very loyal to her mother-in-law. It was in this context that Ruth spoke these famous words: "Where you go, I will go," she told Naomi, "your people shall be my people, and your God my God."

The story of Ruth and Naomi is what love is about. It's about loyalty and faithfulness and mutual devotion. Love that endures through any challenge. It's not, "I love you for what you can do for me." Or "I'll love you as long as it is convenient." No. It's, "I'll love you no matter what. I'll always be there."

Ruth was committed to her mother-in-law even when there was nothing for her to gain and everything to lose. When they reached Naomi's hometown of Bethlehem, (sound familiar?) their first priority became survival. Farmers in that day left a portion of their crops in the field so the widows and the poor could come and gather up what remained of the crops. This practice was known as

“gleaning.” It was a way to feed those in need.

Naomi had a relative named Boaz in Bethlehem who owned the fields. He allowed Ruth to glean them. Boaz came to admire Ruth’s character and her devotion to Naomi, and he eventually married her. They had a son they named Obed who was the grandfather of King David. And through this family line Jesus, was born. Isn’t it interesting that in the lineage of Jesus there is a Moabite woman named Ruth, a foreigner? The Moabites were enemies of the people of Israel on their way to the Promised Land, but that old enemies thing apparently didn’t matter to God as Ruth was in the bloodline of Jesus. She’s there in this story as a testament to God’s love that transcends all the barriers we put up sometimes and for the great biblical principle of self-giving love.

Here’s my point; **That kind of love is what the cross is all about...**a love that never quits, never gives up, never fails. It is agape love—sacrificial love from the heart of God. It’s not, “I love you for what you can do for me,” or “I’ll love you as long as it is convenient.” It’s “I’ll love you no matter what. I’ll always be there for you.”

I read a story from a doctor about the sacrificial love he witnessed in the lives of two of his elderly patients, Fred and Ruby. Ruby had advanced Alzheimer’s, and she became more angry and difficult as the disease progressed. But Fred continued to nurse his wife lovingly. Fred devoted himself to her care, even though Ruby could no longer return his love.

And then one day Fred ended up in the hospital with late-stage colon cancer.

He admitted to the doctor that he'd known about his diagnosis for over a year but had refused treatment because he needed all his energy and money to take care of Ruby. Her needs came first. He was willing to suffer and even to die to ensure Ruby got the best care possible.

The cross of Jesus is the ultimate symbol of a love that will never give up on us, a love that would give up everything to save us. And you and I are the recipients of that love. It would be tragic if we didn't pass that love on, wouldn't it? It would be tragic if we lost the joy of sharing Jesus' love with others. He gave all of himself to show us how much God loved us. And the only thing he asks in return is that we share it with others.

The story of Naomi and Ruth, one of the great love stories of all time, reminds us that the greatest love is a love that's sacrificial and self-giving, flowing through you and me from the heart of God. Amen.